American in Iran Says He Reported to CIA

Engineer Expects a Long Stay in Prison

By Peyman Pejman
Special to The Washington Post

Jon Pattis, an American telecommunication engineer arrested in Iran on espionage charges four months ago, said in a press conference in Tehran that he had been supplying the Central Intelligence Agency with information on Iran's economy, military, oil and telecommunications, Iran's official press said yesterday.

"I confess to my espionage activities," Pattis was quoted as saying in his press conference, which the Iranian news agency IRNA, monitored by Reuter, said was broadcast by Iran's state-controlled television.

"But I believe [Iranian] authorities will agree with me that the information I gathered was not used to help the Iraqis in their effort . . . So my activity was nonhostile," Pattis said.

Pattis was arrested June 16 after an Iraqi raid on a major Iranian telecommunications satellite facility at Assadabad, 200 miles southwest of Tehran, that shut down Iran's telephone and telex links with the world for about two weeks.

The CIA would not comment yesterday on the charges but Pattis' sister, Ellen Pattis, who lives in South Carolina, and a spokesman for his employer in Bethesda both said they considered Pattis innocent despite his reported remarks.

According to IRNA, which carried the transcript of the press conference, Pattis said he was relaying his information to the CIA through his office, Cosmos Engineers Inc. in Bethesda.

"One of the company officials knew about my cooperation with the CIA. He probably passed on the information," he said.

Ray Costiglione, a spokesman for Cosmos, called the charges against Pattis "absurd." "If Pattis made the statement that they are saying he made, we can only assume they were made under duress," he said.

According to IRNA, Pattis said the CIA asked him during a trip to the United States earlier this year to gather information on Iran's oil exports at Kharg Island and the extent of damage inflicted on Iran's oil installations by Iraqi strikes.

According to an American source who asked not to be identified, a man who did not identify himself called Pattis when he was on home leave last December and asked for an appointment. The source said he assumed the man who called was a CIA employe.

When the two met in Pattis' office in Bethesda a couple of days later, the man told Pattis that "his office knew Pattis was traveling to Iran on an Italian passport and that it would be better for him to cooperate and provide the information he and his office wanted," the source said. Ellen Pattis has said her brother told her he made visits to Iran using a false Italian passport. The Iranian government had requested the arrangement, she said.

The information the visitor requested, the source said, was related to Iran's military, economy and oil production and to the internal situation in Iran. Pattis told the source that he had declined to cooperate with the man.

Cathy Pherson, a spokeswoman for the CIA, said the agency had no comment about Pattis' remarks or the alleged meeting in Pattis' office.

According to a staff member for Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati agreed during a visit to the United Nations recently to allow a U.N. representative to visit Pattis. The Swiss Embassy in Tehran, which represents American interests in Iran, has not been allowed to meet with Pattis.

It was not known when the representative would go to Tehran. Pattis' sister has said her brother is in poor health.

Iran said last month that Pattis would be tried on espionage charges, but did not indicate when.

In his press conference, Pattis was quoted as saying, "most probably I will spend a long time in prison . . . I do not think I will be freed from prison before there is any change between the American and Iranian governments."

Ellen Pattis said of her brother's remarks, "From what I have read of the quotes, it is not my brother's typical way of expressing himself."

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